

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, LOCK SHOP
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Building No.
1276)
(Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center)
(Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center)
Southwest of intersection of Descanso & Juniper Streets
Downey
Los Angeles County
California

HABS CA-2800-U
HABS CA-2800-U

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, LOCK SHOP
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles Building No. 1276)
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center

HABS No. CA-2800-U

Location: 7601 Imperial Highway, located directly southwest of the intersection of Descanso and Juniper Streets.

U.S. Geological Survey Los Angeles Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 3754281 N; 392445.1 E

Present Owner / Occupant: County of Los Angeles

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The Lock Shop is significant under National Register of Historic Places Criterion A for its association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history. Located on what is now known as the Rancho Los Amigos South Campus, the historic district portrays the establishment of the County Poor Farm at this location in 1887, its transition into a facility for long-term indigent medical care between the two world wars, and its emergence as a medical and rehabilitation center in the early post World War II years. The Lock Shop was erected in 1913 to function as a gas station. Underground gas tanks were located to the north of the building. The rear room, which originally served as storage space for paint, fuel oil, and pipe fittings, was converted into a lock shop. In later years, the Lock Shop was replaced by master mechanic offices. The construction of the Lock Shop in 1913 reflects the need for gasoline at the property to conduct agricultural and construction activities during this period. The Lock Shop is representative of the property's self-sufficiency during the 1910s where on-site accommodation for specialized activities at the property were necessary. The Lock Shop was abandoned in the late twentieth-century.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. **Date of erection:** 1913¹
2. **Architect:** No known architect could be associated with the Lock Shop.
3. **Original and subsequent owners:** County of Los Angeles (1887/1888–present)

¹ According to historic aerial photographs and Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. Centennial. Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888-1988. Downey, California: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, LOCK SHOP
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building No. 1276)
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center
HABS No. CA-2800-U (Page 2)

4. **Original and subsequent occupants:** County of Los Angeles (1887/1888–present)
5. **Builder, contractor, suppliers:** No known builder, contractor, or supplier could be associated with the Lock Shop.
6. **Original plans and construction:** No building permits, original plans, or construction drawings were found for the Lock Shop.
7. **Alterations and additions:** Alterations as they appear from historic photographs include the stucco addition made to the west elevation (rear) of the original building.

B. Historic Context:

Begun in 1887/1888 as the new County Poor Farm, Rancho Los Amigos upon its inception was a rehabilitation facility that provided work, housing, and medical care to the indigent. The original purchase of 124.4 acres in the vicinity of the town of Downey, founded in 1873, was graded for roads, supplied with water from an artesian well, and improved with a Refectory Building (Dining Hall), the North and South Wards, an aviary, and an Office Building by 1889. During the following decade, barns and ancillary buildings with agricultural functions, a freight and passenger railroad depot, a combined bathhouse and laundry facility, and an additional ward were added.

By the 1890s, the County Poor Farm's livestock and agricultural operations were self-sufficient. The County Poor Farm had a herd of nearly 100 Jersey and Holstein cows, which provided a daily output of 200 gallons of milk. For eggs, the farm relied upon its productive, 800-chicken poultry farm located east of Erickson Avenue and north of Gardendale Street. East of the poultry yard was a hog farm, which supported approximately 150 Berkshire and Poland hogs. Sheep were raised and used for their wool. Percheron draft horses were kept to assist with heavy labor tasks. A wide range of crops were grown at the County Poor Farm, including fruits such as strawberries, peaches, and pears, and vegetables such as cabbage, corn, celery, onions, radishes, sugar beets, peas, cucumbers, and olives. With the assistance of farm supervisors, able-bodied patients helped work the fields and orchards, for which they received compensation of \$1.50 per day. Irrigation was provided primarily by the farm's artesian well. Water from the well was pumped using a 10-horse power engine and stored in a water tower.²

The County Poor Farm began to make a profit from agriculture in 1909, with oranges its notable and profitable crop. In April 1909, the Semi-Tropical Fruit Exchange paid over \$10,000 for 33 cars of navel oranges which constituted about one half of the County Poor Farm's total yield. In May 1909, another \$5,000 worth of oranges were sold. The crop was considered so valuable that a high fence was constructed to protect the County Poor Farm's orange grove from thieves, which was calculated to have saved the County from approximately two train car loads worth of stolen oranges that year.

² Fliedner, Colleen Adair. 1990. *Centennial, Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center, 1888–1988*. Downey, CA: Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, LOCK SHOP
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building No. 1276)
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center
HABS No. CA-2800-U (Page 3)

The County Poor Farm's agricultural operations not only met daily needs but also provided surpluses of milk and fresh produce to the Los Angeles County Hospital in downtown Los Angeles. Sales between the Los Angeles County Hospital and the County Poor Farm saved Los Angeles County thousands of dollars each year. By 1911, it was reported that the County Poor Farm was supplying the Los Angeles County Hospital with over \$13,000 worth of produce and milk annually.³ This mutually beneficial arrangement between the County Poor Farm and Los Angeles County Hospital continued for many years until farming operations at the County Poor Farm ceased in the 1950s.

The County Poor Farm grew into a nationally recognized institution in the fields of cultivation and scientific breeding as a producer of prized crops and livestock. In addition to operating a successful agricultural enterprise, the County Poor Farm gradually expanded its role as a County medical facility. An increasing number of inmates with chronic medical disorders were being admitted to the County Poor Farm during the 1910s, prompting administrators to employ a staff of physicians and nurses to treat them. This surge in patients, and subsequently employees, would create the impetus for expanded development at the County Poor Farm in ensuing decades. The influx of new patients at the County Poor Farm provided the impetus for the expansion of services and facilities needed, resulting in the construction of a number of buildings at the property. The County Poor Farm's expansion reflected an important shift as the focus of the facility transitioned from rehabilitative care for indigents into a hospital to house long-term invalid patients.

PART II. ARCHITECTURE INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. **Architectural character:** The brick vernacular style Lock Shop is one-story, symmetrical in appearance and rectangular in plan. The building has retained most of its character-defining features that include: flat roof screened by brick parapet with raised coping; brick exterior walls in common bond pattern; corbelled brick cornice which separates the parapet from the wall plate; and slightly projecting window sills of header bricks.
2. **Condition of fabric:** The current condition of the Lock Shop is fair. Many of the building's windows and doors have been boarded over.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. **Overall dimensions:** The Lock Shop has a rectangular floor plan and is one-story in height. The net interior condition space (interior dimensions exclusive of covered or enclosed exterior spaces) calculates to 624 square feet. The building has a gross area of exterior square footage and a footprint of 724 square feet.⁴

³ *Los Angeles Times*. 3 May 1909 "Fence Saves County Cash," p. 15.

⁴ Sapphos Environmental, Inc. 15 December 2008. Revised Memorandum for the Record, 1217-056, No. 21, Update to

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, LOCK SHOP
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building No. 1276)
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center
HABS No. CA-2800-U (Page 4)

2. **Foundations:** The building sits on a concrete slab foundation.
3. **Walls:** Exterior walls consist of brick laid in common bond pattern.
4. **Structural system, framing:** The structural system for the Lock Shop consists of a flat roof supported by brick walls.
5. **Openings:**
 - a. **Windows:** All windows have been boarded over except for those on the façade, which consist of three-light fixed sash. The windows have slightly projecting window sills of header bricks and heavy, flush, concrete lintels.
 - b. **Doors:** The primary entrance is located centrally on the façade and is topped by a transom window. The primary entrance door is boarded over. Secondary entrances are found on the western sections of the south and north elevations and they consist of wood doors; the door on the north elevation is glazed and has been boarded over.
6. **Roof:**

The building is capped by a flat roof screened by a brick parapet with raised coping.
- C. **Description of Interior:** The Lock Shop has an open floor plan with one office along the north wall. Entrances into the building are located on the north, south and east elevations.
- D. **Site:**
 1. **General setting:** The area immediately surrounding the Lock Shop is paved in asphalt.
 2. **Orientation:** The Lock Shop is located directly southwest of the intersection of Descanso and Juniper Streets. The east façade is primary.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

No original drawings for the Lock Shop were discovered. A set of as-found drawings were prepared for the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) documentation in 2007 by Mollenhauer Group for the County of Los Angeles.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, LOCK SHOP
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building No. 1276)
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center
HABS No. CA-2800-U (Page 5)

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LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, LOCK SHOP
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building No. 1276)
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center
HABS No. CA-2800-U (Page 6)

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LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, LOCK SHOP
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building No. 1276)
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center
HABS No. CA-2800-U (Page 7)

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LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, LOCK SHOP
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building No. 1276)
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center
HABS No. CA-2800-U (Page 8)

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LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, LOCK SHOP
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building No. 1276)
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center
HABS No. CA-2800-U (Page 9)

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LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, LOCK SHOP
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building No. 1276)
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center
HABS No. CA-2800-U (Page 10)

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LOS ANGELES COUNTY POOR FARM, LOCK SHOP
(Rancho Los Amigos, Los Angeles County Building No. 1276)
Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center
HABS No. CA-2800-U (Page 11)

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C. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

Rancho Los Amigos Foundation collection

D. Supplemental Material:

Reduced copies of 2007 as-found drawings

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

HABS documentation for the Storage was prepared by Sapphos Environmental, Inc. staff from December 2006 to June 2010 on behalf of the County of Los Angeles Chief Executive Office (CEO). The HABS documentation serves as mitigation to comply with the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the proposed Campus Plan project. Measured surveys were carried out in 2007 by Mollenhauer Group, Los Angeles, California. Photographs were taken from January 2010 to June 2010 by Mr. David Lee, production manager, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Part I of the historical report (historic context) was prepared by Ms. Shannon Carmack, senior cultural resources coordinator, Ms. Rebecca Silva, senior cultural resources coordinator, Ms. Deborah Howell-Ardila, senior cultural resources coordinator, Ms. Marlise Fratinardo, senior cultural resources coordinator, and Ms. Laura Carias, cultural resources coordinator, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Part II of the historical report (architectural information) was prepared by Ms. Rebecca Silva, senior cultural resources coordinator, Ms. Marlise Fratinardo, senior cultural resources coordinator, and Ms. Laura Carias, cultural resources coordinator, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. Ms. Leslie Heumann, Sapphos Environmental, Inc. manager of cultural resources, reviewed the final report and supporting documents, and provided research, writing, and project oversight.